

Gretchen Rubin: I think it really is helpful as you're trying to think about how can you be happier, healthier, more productive, more creative. To think about how can I do these things most days, or even every day, rather than trying to do heroic efforts every so often. A lot of times in the end they just don't stick. They don't matter as much.

(Intro Music)

Robert Glazer: Welcome to Elevate, a podcast about achievement, personal growth and pushing limits in leadership and life. I'm Robert Glazer, and I chat with world class performers who have committed to elevating their own life, pushing the limits of their capacity, and helping others do the same.

Lenox Powell: This episode was previously recorded and published on the Outperform Podcast

Robert Glazer: I'm really excited to have Gretchen Rubin with us today as our guest. Gretchen is the author of multiple books, including the number one New York Times Best Sellers The Happiness Project, Happier At Home, Better Than Before, and The Four Tendencies. Gretchen and her sister Elizabeth also have their own podcast called Happier, where they discuss good habits and happiness. Welcome Gretchen, and thanks so much for joining us on Outperform today.

Gretchen Rubin: Well I'm so happy to be talking to you.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, I've been looking forward to this for awhile. As I mentioned to you, my wife's book club was reading The Happiness Project a few months ago. My wife was quoting it to me at dinner as I was [crosstalk 00:01:32]. I was losing patience with my kids fighting at each other. That's actually how it made its way on to my reading list. I've had some really great takeaways from it.

Gretchen Rubin: Great. That's excellent to hear.

Robert Glazer: Particularly around acknowledging your children's frustrations and problems.

Gretchen Rubin: Yep. Yeah, acknowledge the reality of other people's feelings. Yes, easier said than done.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, and that probably extends beyond children into adults as well.

Gretchen Rubin: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Robert Glazer: Great. Well before we dive into your books and how happiness and our tendencies affect performance, I want to just talk a little bit about your unique background. Prior to becoming an author, you had a career in law, and you even clerked for Sandra Day O'Connor. What was the aha moment for realizing that you wanted to leave your law career and become a writer?

Gretchen Rubin: Well, it was several things that were coming together all at once. The most important one was that ... I'm a person who throughout my life, I'll get sort of obsessed with things. It's one of my favorite things about myself. I'll do a lot of research and take a lot of notes. At that time I had gotten into an obsession that was so big. I was doing this research and taking all these notes in my free time like after work, and on the weekends. It actually did become my first book, which was called Power, Money, Fame, Sex. At a certain point I was like, I'm doing this in my free time, but some people write books for a living. That idea was in my head. Some people write books for a living. Also, I went to visit a friend who was in education graduate school and she had all these really boring looking textbooks lying around. I said to her kind of dismissively, I said, "Ugh, is this the kind of stuff you have to read for your program?" She said, "Yeah, but that's the stuff I read on my own anyway." I thought, "Wow, I want to be doing something where what I'm doing for work is what I would be doing anyway."

I was clerking on the Supreme Court, so I was surrounded by people who loved law. They wanted to talk about law during the lunch hour. They were reading law journals on the weekend. They were constantly talking about law. I could see that they loved it in a way that I did not love it. I did what I had to do, to do an excellent job for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, but I did not do anything extra. I could tell that I was different from these people, that they really loved it in a way that I didn't love it. At a certain point I started feeling the pull toward writing this book because I had the idea. For a lot of writers, and I feel this way too, there's sort of a compulsion to do it. You sort of feel like you have to do it.

I was getting drawn increasingly in the direction of writing this book. Then finally it occurred to me, at this point I would rather fail as a writer than succeed as a lawyer. I need to really try. I need to really try to see if I can make this my occupation. I went out to the bookstore and got a book called something like How To Write and Sell Your Non-Fiction Book Proposal. I just followed the directions and got an agent and sold a book proposal, and that was my first book. Which makes it sound easier than it was obviously. All these things are sort of coming together within the same year, 18 month span.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, I had Dan Pink on a few [crosstalk 00:04:36]

Gretchen Rubin: I know Dan. Dan and I went to the same law school. He doesn't mention it very often. I don't know that he wants people to know. He's a recovering lawyer too. Yeah, we didn't overlap, but we both went to Yale Law School.

Robert Glazer: There must be something about that. They must teach good writing there. I was asking him whether the midlife crisis was a real thing or not, and he said that it's not, that there's a lull but it doesn't justify the behavior that people have. But there is something about people sitting down and reflecting on, do I like this, is it a career, or I love it. So many people struggle to make their passion a career. They're close. What was the last moment that made you sort of jump over? What was the straw?

Gretchen Rubin:

Well, it's interesting that you mention passion because I think for some people the word passion is very intimidating. It's a very high bar and I think sometimes people are like, "Well, I don't really like what I'm doing, but do I feel passionate about something else?" It feels like it's hard. In my case, I do think with certain vocations there are people who feel compelled to do something. I've talked to people who are doctors who feel compelled to be doctors. I've talked to physical trainers who feel compelled to do physical training. I was reading the show notes that this avant garde circus that my family and I went to, and clearly reading the notes from the people, people were like, "I basically dropped everything in my life and went to join the circus." They felt this compulsion.

I think for some people it's not so much what you're leaving, it's what's ... I really truly felt like the death star had me in its tractor beam and I was like, "You better take your hands off the control of the Millennium Falcon or it's just going to rip this ship apart." Once I had the idea in my head, this is the book I want to write, and I was on the way, it felt just increasingly like a thing that I had to try. I think in my case it was made easier by the fact that everyone close to me was very supportive of me taking a big risk. I think often sadly people out of the deepest sense of love want to protect you, they don't want to see you take a risk, they don't want to see you get your feelings hurt. They don't want to see you risk failure. They don't want to see you risk economic risk. They really counsel you to do whatever they think is safe.

But the problem is nothing's safe. How many people do we all know who are in professions that are basically gone or changed, and to crazy degree? I think it's hard for somebody else to know what is safe for you. But my family and my husband were all very much like, "If this is what you want to do, that's great. You should try it." Here I had amassed all the credentials that I could possibly need, all the legal credentials. It was at exactly that point that I'm like, "And now I'm going to start over with nothing." I did not have a clip. I didn't write for the college newspaper. I didn't write short stories. I had nothing. And yet they were very supportive and I think that made it easier for me. I might've done it anyway, but it certainly would've required a lot more turmoil for me, whereas they were kind of like, "If you want to give this a try, great, give it a try. See how it goes." That made it a lot easier for me.

Robert Glazer:

You said two things in there that are going to require me to jump ahead just to follow up on some of the concepts that I think are interesting. One is the safety one. I remember interviewing someone a few months ago from a company that it's large, but headed in a very downward direction. Her fear about coming to work with us was that we were smaller and up and coming. I asked her if she had given thoughts at all to the people that were leaving, and that might not be safe. It just hadn't really occurred to her. I think particularly when there's major paradigm shifts, I think there's a false sense of what is safe versus what feels safe and familiar.

Gretchen Rubin: Yes, I think that's a thing. I think what is safe is skills. If you have good skills, then you can maybe plug yourself in a lot of ways and that's safe, but saying to someone, "You should be a lawyer because it's safer to be a lawyer than it is to be a writer," well on the one hand that's seems true, but then on the other hand it's like, "Well, but as it turns out, what I have worked out great for me and I love it." I think it's very hard to intervene with other people and know what is the best course for them. Like you say, things are changing so fast. You might be telling someone to do a job that's not going to exist in five years. That's very foreseeable.

Robert Glazer: Being a great horse and buggy repair guy when the Model T came around probably wasn't very safe.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah. Yeah. I would never say to people like, "Well, so what you should do is just quit your job and go write the great American novel. Quit your job and go start your ... do your entrepreneur thing." There's ways to do it safely, and I did it in a safe way. I did a ton of the work while I still had a day job. I was writing my proposal and I was doing a lot of research, so I was getting everything going while I was still working. I was married. My husband had a job. I didn't have any kids. We were still in the part of our lives where we were traveling light, but we were traveling together. It was a good time to take a risk.

That's another thing, there's easier times to take risk and trickier times to take risk. Part of what I thought was like, I need to do this now because if I wait, if I take another law job and let that play out for a couple of years I might not feel like I can take the risk. I might not be willing to take a risk because I'll just be in a different place in my career. I was like, this is kind of my chance. I felt like this is my opportunity. This is the right window for me to try it, so I should do it now or acknowledge that I might never do it. That was a very painful feeling for me.

I did not pick the time lightly. I think there's ways to manage risks. I'm friends with Chris Guillebeau who has the Side Hustle School podcast. He talks about, you can start a side hustle that's going to give you more flexibility and more security. You don't have to quit your day job. You can get that going, and then if it gets so big that that can become your job, well then that's great and it's already up and running. People sometimes think it's all or nothing. I either need to throw everything or way or stay in my dull day job for the rest of my life. It's like, well, can you kind of figure out a way so that you can take a risk that's not so risky?

Robert Glazer: Yeah, Adam Grant talked about passing on Warby Parker because they wouldn't quit their day job. He went to look up a bunch of data that said that businesses are more successful where people didn't quit their day job, which I would've thought the complete opposite as well.

Gretchen Rubin: I think part of it is just to know yourself too, and to be realistic about what kind of circumstances work for you. I'm the kind of person where if you were like,

"Gretchen you need to sit down and write an 80,000 word book and get that done," I'm like, "Okay, I could do that." That's the kind of thing I knew I could do. It felt very much like, "Okay, this is the kind of thing I can do." Would anybody buy it? Would anybody publish it? Would anybody want to read it? That I did not know, but I knew, "I can do that." Sometimes you don't know whether you can do it until you've tried, but I was like, "Yeah, I'm 95% confident I can do that." This is the very much the kind of thing for me. Yeah.

Robert Glazer: We'll jump into happiness in a second, but the other part that you made me think of in terms of the advice that people give us, I've been writing about this recently as I finish my second book. I'm fascinated by cognitive dissonance. I think it occurs to me too that a lot of people give us advice that's very skewed about the decisions that they made, or didn't make. It's very blinded about not what is best for us, but justifying their own decisions. And family, a lot of that comes from ... I see family holding people back even though they say they want them to do it, but they're holding them back with the words that they use.

Gretchen Rubin: No, I think that's one of the reasons why you have to be very careful about seeking advice, just because it's almost impossible not to have a bias in advice. It's either what you did and worked out for you, or it's what you didn't do and that you wish you did, or maybe you don't want ... There's just many ways that your own emotion ... If it's your own children, it's very hard to give disinterested advice. I think what's best is when people help you think through it and analyze yourself and our own desires, your own motivations, what's going on, how are you going to do it. They can help you get clear in your own head, but them telling you what you should do probably is not such a great ... It's not like their advice is wrong necessarily, it might just not be right for you, and might not be right for you right now. There's just so many things to think about.

Robert Glazer: They don't even know that it's justifying their own decision. It's not-

Gretchen Rubin: No, 100% no. No, it's all unconscious. You think, "Well, you could do this," and it's like, well maybe you could do this, but could this other person do this? If somebody said to me, "Well Gretchen, you could sit down and write an 80,000 word book," I'd be like, "Yes, I can do that." Not everybody can do that. Even people who want to write a book would need to set it up in a different way. I think you can't help but be influenced by your own perspective. Sometimes that's valuable and people want to hear your perspective, but if you're listening to other people's perspectives you always have to remember that they don't see the world the way you see it and they're not experiencing the choices that you are experiencing.

Robert Glazer: You've written quite a few books. I think I counted nine on your site, and your earlier books seem to fall into the historical genre. Why the shift to writing about happiness?

Gretchen Rubin: Actually, I know it looks that way from the outside but to me all the books are very much of a piece because they're all about human nature. That is my subject, human nature. It's happiness, it's good habits, it's who are we, why are we the way we are, how do we change if we want to change, it's human nature. You're exactly right, I wrote a biography called 40 Ways to Look at Winston Churchill, and another biography called 40 Ways to Look at JFK. The reason that I was drawn to these characters is they are so enormous. They cast such a gigantic shadow in the world that you can study human nature with them. There's so much documentary evidence. There's just so much about them and they did so much that it's a really interesting way to think about human nature. For me, all the books feel very much connected. I think about especially Winston Churchill all the time as I'm thinking about happiness and human nature. But from the outside they look very disparate, yeah.

Robert Glazer: There's always a theme. I'm curious, I'm not sure I've ... in the stuff I've read where you've covered this, out of 100 do you have a thesis on what you would ascribe to nature versus nurture in terms of the components?

Gretchen Rubin: Well, at least with happiness, about 50% of happiness is genetically determined. I think generally for personality it's probably like that. I'm a big believer in the genetic roots of personality, absolutely. I don't know what the number is, but for happiness at least it's like 50% is the number you mostly usually hear about.

Robert Glazer: That's generally the rule, that parents can only take half the credit or half the blame in most situations.

Gretchen Rubin: Well, I would say for that I would say even less. I think you can really screw your children up, but I think basically my view is that you get what you get and you don't get upset. They're very much responding to their peers and things like that. Maybe it's just a way of self-justifying my parenting style, which is pretty much like I don't consider my children to be clay that I can shape very much. I'm kind of like well, I want to help you get where you want to go and I want to help you make the most of what you have and help you see yourself more clearly. I don't really feel like if I signed you up for guitar lessons for the next three years at the end of it you would end up being passionate about guitar if that's not inside you. Of course many people believe that you can.

Robert Glazer: There's exposure, right? There's a balance. I watch a lot of parents these days and I think you need to be exposed to a variety of things to even know what the possibility is, but it's hard to be great at something if you don't love it.

Gretchen Rubin: Well, and it's hard not to be exposed to a lot of things. Are you exposed to chess? Could you not be exposed to chess? My children would've been delighted not to be exposed to chess. They were exposed to chess left and right. Are they interested in chess? No. If I'd signed them up for classes would they be interested in chess? No. Obviously on the margins, and it can be fun. It's like okay yeah, this is just fun. I think a lot of parents think that they are shaping

their children much more, whereas I'm like, I think that's the child that you had already and you're just ascribing it to what you do instead of thinking that would they be exactly the same way had I done something different, I think a lot of times. It's one of the things I think is fascinating, that no one ever really seems to talk about is how do children affect parents. I think children almost affect parents more than parents affect children. You're wildly shaped by the nature of your children. Nobody ever seems to really talk about that. They're not reading up books on how to get your parent to go to bed on time. You know what I mean?

Robert Glazer: How to get your parents riled up. Am I hearing 70/30 80/20? Is that your nature-

Gretchen Rubin: Oh I don't know. I never thought about it. That's like a factual question and I don't have any particular expertise on it.

Robert Glazer: You like to research. [inaudible 00:17:25] so maybe you'll dig into that.

Gretchen Rubin: Yes, I love to research.

Robert Glazer: The million dollar question, what is your definition of happiness?

Gretchen Rubin: Well, as we talked about, I started out my career in law and we spent a whole semester talking about the definition of contract. What is a contract. That turned me off forever, the quest for the definition. Happiness is even more elusive definition than contract. There was something like 15 academic definitions of happiness. Then people love to play this game of saying, "Well, you want to be happier but I don't think happiness matters. I think it's joy, or bliss, or contentment, or satisfaction, or fulfillment, or peace, or hedonic well being." You can get into that, so I avoid the whole thing altogether. I say I don't define happiness like Justice Potter Stuart. I know it when I see it. I think it's actually much more helpful to think about being happier.

The word happiness conjures up for people this idea of a perfect state, and then it's like how do you get there, how do you know if you're there, how do you stay there once you're there, can you be there 24/7? Well, to me it's can you be happier. Next week, next month, next year, could you do things in your ordinary life right now that could make you happier? That, people see very clearly. They know for the most part; they have lots of ideas. Like for me, I constantly am thinking of things. If I did this I think I would be happier. Then you can just do them and see if you're happier. You know what that feels like.

So I just avoid the question altogether.

Robert Glazer: Okay. So it's easier for people to see tangible places where they could be incremental happier than to think it's reaching some [pancia 00:19:04] of a state. Is that sort of-

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah, and also I don't think that's realistic. I don't think you would even want that. I think to be perfectly happy all the time wouldn't even be a good life. I don't think it's realistic. But I think it's like could you be happier. For all of us, it seems like the aim should be to be as happy as you can be under the circumstances in which you find yourself. Sometimes it's not appropriate to be happier. My mom's in the hospital, it's like I don't expect myself to be a nine on the one to 10 scale. Negative emotions are very, very important for us. We should spend a lot of time thinking about our negative emotions and what they tell us because they're big flashing warning signs, giving us information about our situation.

But it's like, well given your situation are you as happy as you can be? You might as well be as happy as you can be under your circumstances because then you're just going to be happier. I think for most people, certainly for me ... I found this when I wrote The Happiness Project, and then ever since I still find it to be true. There's plenty of stuff, low-lying fruit, low hanging fruit that I can do to make myself happier without spending a lot of time, energy, or money, just as part of an ordinary routine that can make myself happier. Why wouldn't I? I think it's worth doing. Yeah, I think that that's right.

Robert Glazer: What's the biggest deficit of being unhappy or not as happy as someone can be then, given that definition? Both personally and professionally, what's the biggest outcome?

Gretchen Rubin: Well, if you had to say what is the secret to happiness or what's the principle cause for unhappiness, I think the answer ... and ancient philosophers and contemporary scientists would agree on this ... is relationships. To be happy, people need strong relationships. We need to feel like we belong. We need to be able to confide. We need to feel like we can get support. It's just as important for happiness, we need to be able to feel like we can give support. We need deep enduring bonds with other people. When you look at the people who are happier, what you see is that they tend to have more deep relationships.

If you look at people at work and you say, "Well, what distinguishes people who are happy and less happy at work?" The question, do you have a friend at work, not just a pal that you can talk about pop culture and sports with but someone where you feel like this person has your back. If you have a friend at work, and if you feel like your manager, the person you report to cares about you and cares about what happens to you and wants to help you succeed according to your own aims, those make people happier.

Anytime we're trying to figure out what to do with our time, energy, or money, something that deepens relationships or broadens relationships, those are the things that are going to work. Now there's plenty, many, many, many, many other things to do, many, many other important elements of the happier life, but if you had to say pick one, that is the one I would pick is relationships.

Robert Glazer: I've always said when people are struggling with certain relationships in their life, there are things that make them unhappy. Maybe you have more options, but I've always felt there were two choices. I think I heard someone say this. You can either change your relationship with that person or you can change your reaction to it. I think people struggle with the latter more of, "I know it's going to happen. I know my friend's going to come over and going to say this. I just can't ignore it and I get myself all worked up." How much is on people to just, the stuff that they know that ... I was speaking to someone this morning and they were saying that they get these small customer service complaints that they get in and they keep them up at night. They know it shouldn't, but now it affects their overall happiness. How do you reprogram or tune out the stuff where your reaction to it is causing a disproportionate amount of unhappiness than it should?

Gretchen Rubin: Well, I think it's hard to answer that generally. I don't think there's one magical answer that can kind of cover that.

Robert Glazer: How about some tips?

Gretchen Rubin: Well one thing is, sometimes feeling of anger, resentment, fear are legitimate. You don't want to always say, "Well, I should never feel guilty," or "I should never feel angry," because maybe there's a reason that you feel angry and maybe you want to act on that. Maybe you want to solve the problem. Maybe you're like, "Every day my boss makes me feel bad." You could say to yourself, "Oh, I need to make peace with it," that is one thing to do. Another thing is to be like, "You know what? I'm going to get another job."

Robert Glazer: Right.

Gretchen Rubin: I don't think the answer is always to just figure out how to get rid of the emotion because the negative emotion is an important signal. Now, sometimes you're like, "You know what? My boss really bugs me, but basically his heart is in the right place. Basically this is the job that I want so I just need to deal with this in a way so it doesn't drive me crazy day to day." One of the things you can do is to think about gratitude. Gratitude is an emotion that drives out negative feelings like resentment and boredom. If you can think to yourself, "You know what? The guy's annoying, yes that's true, but basically he really cares about me. He's come through for me many times. He's a big believer in my abilities. I love this job. Remember this is the guy who hired me. He believes in me. Can't I just laugh it off when he does this thing that bothers me? I'm so grateful to have this opportunity."

That feeling of gratitude is something that can help you. Another thing is to think about what is your role in it. What's that line from therapy? If you spot it, you got it. Young has some beautiful ... Carl Jung line about everything that annoys us about other people can teach us about ourselves. It's like, "Why is this bothering you?" There's probably something that you could learn about

yourself from it, so try to understand what's going on here. I'm a person who really likes a schedule. I like a schedule, I like everything to happen in a regular way. I like to know what's coming up, and I have an idea in my head like everything that's going to happen at what time. I'm not very flexible about changing at the last minute or like when things are left open like, "Well, we'll just figure out what to do this afternoon."

If I had a boss who was always like changing the plans, that would really, really annoy me, but probably my dedication to a strict schedule would really annoy the boss. It's sort of like, well maybe it's a situation where it's not that one person's right or one person's wrong, but there's just a conflict in approach. The question is, how can we create a situation where both people get what they want instead of bugging each other. Or like another thing, so I'm a person who I'm kind of working all the time. That's the way I like to do things. I was collaborating with somebody who didn't like to work on the weekends. I didn't know that, and so I was sending work emails all through the weekend. My view was like, "Well, do whatever you want. You can answer them over the weekend, you can wait till Monday. I don't care. Just do your work in your way. I'm doing my work in my own way. Can't we all just be free to work however works best?"

But then I found out this person was really resenting it. So I thought, "Okay, I could change or she could change, or we could just come up with a solution so that neither one of us has to change and we both get to work the way we want." So I learned how to use delay delivery in Outlook, and so now every Monday morning at 8:00 AM she gets like five emails from me. That works for her, it works for me, like problem solved. But I was really, really annoying her without even realizing it. But was it that I was doing something wrong? Well, it wasn't really that it was wrong, it's just that we have different styles and different approaches. So sometimes just by acknowledging, "Well, it's not that I'm right and you're wrong, or that you need to change or there's something wrong with you, or that there's something wrong with me. It's like how do we come to a place that works for both of us without having a lot of judgment about who's right and who's wrong."

Robert Glazer: No, and communication, it all comes down to the heart of communication.

Gretchen Rubin: Yes.

Robert Glazer: I actually use that exact same tactic. I've learned the hard way on the delay delivery.

Gretchen Rubin: There you go, right?

Robert Glazer: People email me all week. I can't catch up until Saturday, so usually on Saturday mornings I was replying back. I was responding to [crosstalk 00:26:39] and then they're all going to get emails from Saturday and be like, "What a bleep." I did a staggered delayed delivery from Sunday night till Monday afternoon of all the

emails. I've found that trick over the years. I think that's a really actually helpful one.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah, yeah. Sometimes it's just a matter of figuring it out. You're right, the communication is really the hard thing. I only kind of by chance found out that I was annoying this person. She did not tell me directly. I wish she had just told me directly because I wouldn't have been mad. But it is oftentimes, you're right, the communication is what is key and often people shy away from that. That's another thing. Maybe the more profound thing is if there's a problem, try to communicate with the person. In an impersonal calm way, is there a solution that we can figure out for this rather than people walking around in kind of a simmering state of resentment, or anger, or boredom, or fear, or whatever it might be.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, because my perspective, I'm taking the time on a Saturday to get back to you. I thought you'd be appreciative, but it creates the need for them to feel like they need to respond. It's usually, the communication is at the heart of most of these issues.

Gretchen Rubin: I do massive amount of work Saturday and Sunday morning. That's one of my best times to work.

Robert Glazer: I love to work then.

Gretchen Rubin: I'm just flooding people, flooding people. I know there's people, and there are people who have said to me, "I'm fine. Just send it on the weekend but I'm not going to tell you I'm going to necessarily get back to you until Monday." I'm like, "Cool, whatever you want." I'll always mark it. If it's urgent, I will mark it urgent and say, "I need an answer right away." I always just assume that this is for you to do at your convenience. What I do, there's no urgency really, rarely is there urgency. But it's very good to just have that conversation because then it's like, okay. We just all know how to proceed. I think you learn with experience, like let's have that conversation, on your first day. Or like my husband who hires a bunch of people, he'll say, "I expect you to email me back as soon as you can and I mean at night, over the weekend, that's the kind of job that this is." Everything happens right away.

Robert Glazer: But he's clear about it.

Gretchen Rubin: But he's clear. A lot of people like to work that way. They like urgency, they like that sense. You could say, ooh people should take a break from their phone or whatever, but that's the kind of workplace that he fosters. Right, and when you're clear about it then ... Or, somebody could push back and say, "Well listen, I can do that somewhat but from 6:00-9:00 that's family time, I just can't do that. If it's other than that I will, but during that time no," then it would be up to my husband to say well, can he live with that. Probably he could. You know what I mean? Again, it's, like you say, communication. Let's talk it through. What

works for you, what works for me, can we find a way to figure out something that works for both of us? Rather than saying, everything's all or nothing.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, and that's actually a good segue to the work environment. We have tended to associate happiness with engagement, which is why we're always measuring it and asking people why they're happy because we just think that intuitively if they're not happy they're not engaged and they're not doing a great job. What is your research tell you about happiness in the work environment?

Gretchen Rubin: Well, as I said, one of the two most important things are, do you have a friend at work and do you feel like your boss cares about you, your direct boss not your charismatic boss who gives a big keynote, but your actual report, who you report to. Then people do need a sense of purposefulness that what they're doing is contributing. I think that the larger idea of this is growth, and that people are happier when they live in an atmosphere of growth. Growth is, are you fixing things, are you moving things along, are you contributing, are you learning, are you making something better, something that's not working that well are you making it better, are you adding to the world. For some people that's very important to have a mission, like, "I'm bringing water to the desert." Then for some people it's just like, "I just want to do a great job for my team and really deliver this product to a customer who's going to feel like they got what they wanted."

Nobody wants make work, or things that feel arbitrary or pointless. You want to have that feeling of growth. Without the feeling of growth, people start to feel kind of paralyzed or stagnant, or like their life is going nowhere. It's sort of like are you having opportunities? Maybe you haven't really done many public presentations, but now you're starting to do public presentations. The problem with the atmosphere of growth is it's kind of scary at the beginning. You can feel insecure, you can feel resentful, you can feel dumb. You're like, "Okay, I'll give a presentation," and maybe that's really intimidating. Then you do it a couple more times and then you feel better about it. Then you're like, "Wow, I've got a new skill. I can absolutely stand up in front of a group of 500 people and give a big presentation." That's growth. I think that's a big part of [inaudible 00:31:30]

And feeling control. One of the things that is a major happiness stumbling block is when people feel like they don't have control. Feeling like you don't have control of your time. We were just talking about this, right? Email is a way that people feel like they're not in control of their time. How do you feel like you're in control of your time? Are you working in your own way? Are you allowed to make choices? Are you allowed to do things in your own way or do you feel micromanaged where somebody's constantly telling you what to do? That's not a good feeling. People want to feel that sense of control.

Robert Glazer: Should leaders focus more on capacity building overall with employees in terms of the ... Sometimes growth for growth's sake in a job isn't available, but you were talking before about speaking or just doing things outside of their

comfortable zone. Is just the ability to increase your capacity correlated with your ability to become happier, or be happier with what you're doing?

Gretchen Rubin: Well, I don't think it would be just growth for growth's sake because people might get very annoyed by that. Like, "Why am I supposed to be doing these online modules to teach me something that I don't need to know how to do?" Nobody wants to do something that seems totally random. That just feels like you're being controlled. I think part of it is that it needs to feel like it's purposeful growth, that there's a reason that I'm learning this. I'm going to be able to put it to use. There's some point to it. I think just like saying to people like, "We're going to go around the room and everybody's going to public speak so that everybody gets better public speaking," I don't know that that would be helpful in all circumstances. It might be in some, but in some places somebody might be like, "That's just not my skillset. I'm not interested in that. I don't have to do that. You might as well teach me to juggle."

Robert Glazer: But what if you put it ... One thing we tested this year was really getting everyone to focus on their personal goals and share those. What if you said, "Look-

Gretchen Rubin: Oh right. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, what's interesting though about sharing goals and this kind of gets me to my personality framework, The Four Tendencies, for some people if they share a goal it's very powerful for them and that really helps them meet a goal and take a goal seriously and feel like it's an act in the world. But there's a certain number of people for whom if they tell people their goals and their aims, they kind of lose their magic. They do better when they keep it private. They don't like to tell people. Often if they are in a situation where they have to share it, or they do share it for whatever reason, then they kind of drift away from it. It's a really interesting distinction among people. It's not universally helpful for people to disclose.

Robert Glazer: That's good to know because I think a lot of companies are moving towards very open goal setting, transparency. You're saying that might be good for most people, it might not be good for everyone.

Gretchen Rubin: Yep.

Robert Glazer: Alright, let's put a pin in that for one sec. We're going to take a quick break for a message from our sponsor, and then we'll be back to chat more with Gretchen.

Adam Grant: Hi, I'm Adam Grant. As a Wharton psychologist, I spent most of my career studying two big questions. How do we unlock original thinking and build cultures of productive generosity? With those questions in mind, I recently co-founded a pretty extraordinary community dedicated to discovering groundbreaking ideas while trying to make the world a better place. It's called The Next Big Idea Club. Together my friends Malcolm Gladwell, Susan Cain, Dan Pink, and I searched far and wide for the eight most original, most essential non-

fiction books of the year, and we send them straight to you. We also interview the authors and we send you the key insights across video, audio, and text formats. Remember, this is a book club, so when you join the exclusive online forum, you get the chance to discuss every season's selections not just with other members, but also with me, Malcolm, Susan, and Dan.

Robert Glazer: Get insider insights from Dan Pink, Malcolm Gladwell, Susan Cain and Adam Grant and sign up for The Next Big Idea Club today at www.nextbigideaclub.com/10off and get 10% off your subscription.

Alright, welcome back. Well Gretchen, before we jump into the four tendencies, which we were talking a little bit about before the break, I actually wanted to go over one of your quotes that I have seen in a few places, which is definitely one of my favorite, which is, "What you do every day matters more than what you do once in awhile." I've thought about this quote a lot. There's actually a lot of different ways to interpret it. I really wanted to ask you how you originally meant it.

Gretchen Rubin: Well I think you're right. I think it has a lot of different ... You can think about it in the positive, you can think about it in the negative. I'm sure there's many exceptions to it. Sometimes what you do once in awhile matters more than what you do every day. The opposite of a profound truth is also true. This was something that occurred to me, I was writing my book *Better Than Before*, which is all about habit change, the 21 strategies that people can use to make or break their habits. One way to think about it is what you do every day matters more than what you do once in awhile like for healthy eating, or for exercising. It's better to go for a half a mile walk most days than to go for a five mile run once every two months. It's better to eat healthfully most days than to be extremely strict one day and then call it off, or to give up sugar for Lent and then eat tons of sugar the whole rest of the year. It's like Lent is not as important as what you eat every day.

But it's also helpful to remember in the opposite. It can often be reassuring. I could say something like, "Well you know, it's really important for me to tuck my children into bed at night, but sometimes I can't do that. Sometimes I have evening plans and I just can't be there to tuck them in." But the fact is what I do most days matters more than what I do once in awhile. If sometimes I can't do it, that's okay because most of the time I'm doing that. I don't have to beat myself up too much. I think it can be both a helpful reminder and also a reassurance.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, I immediately thought about my kids when I read that, in terms of if you're attentive one day of the week but ignoring them the rest of the week then probably doesn't help.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah, yeah. You want to think about how can you do something most ... Almost everything, like looking at habits and happiness, for almost everything that

people want to do to make themselves happier, there are things that are daily, they're habit things. They're things that you would do often many times in your life. It's not like going to a 10 day meditation retreat one time. It's like how do I meditate most days for the indefinite future. That's what really is often what's at stake. It's like yeah, maybe you want to spend the weekend clearing your whole house out, but then the question is how do you maintain it little by little over every single day. I think it really is helpful as you're trying to think about how can you be happier, healthier, more productive, more creative, to think about how can I do these things most days, or even every day rather than trying to do heroic efforts every so often. A lot of times in the end they just don't stick. They don't matter as much.

Robert Glazer: No, I think that's really important for everyone who's doing crash diets, or trying to be nice for a day. It really is a great framework to think about what matters and-

Gretchen Rubin: It's a long game. Life is the long game. How do you keep this going for the long game. Yep.

Robert Glazer: Before the break we were talking a little bit about The Four Tendencies, which is your new book. It's a personality framework that you've identified that divides all of us into four types. I took the quiz and I learned that my dominant tendency is upholder. I'd love to hear. Explain-

Gretchen Rubin: I already knew. I could tell that from you already. I wish you'd had me guess and I would've guessed right. Ha ha.

Robert Glazer: We can go back.

Gretchen Rubin: I forget what you said that was the tip-off.

Robert Glazer: Alright, so explain me and then what the other ones are that would be really great.

Gretchen Rubin: Okay, yeah. I'll just briefly describe them. Most people can tell what they are from a brief description, but there is a quiz you can take online at happier[inaudible 00:39:08].com/quiz, or you can just go to my website, gretchenrubin.com. 1.3 million people have taken this quiz now. It's free, it's quick. But like I said, actually a lot of people don't even need to take the quiz, they just know what they are from a very, very brief description. The four tendencies divides people into upholders, like you, upholders, questioners, obligers, and rebels. It has to do with how you respond to expectations. All of us face two kinds of expectations. The expectations that come to us from the outside like a work deadline or a request from a friend. Then we have our own inner expectations like my own desire to keep a New Year's resolution, my own desire to get back into playing guitar.

Upholders readily meet outer and inner expectations. They meet the work deadline, they keep the New Year's resolution without much fuss. They want to know what other people expect from them, but their expectations for themselves are just as important. Then there are questioners. Questioners question all expectations. They'll do something if they think it makes sense. They make everything an inner expectation. If it meets their inner standard, they will meet it. If it fails their inner standard, they will resist. They typically will rail against anything arbitrary, inefficient, irrational. That's what sets them off.

Robert Glazer: That is my youngest son.

Gretchen Rubin: Oh, there you go. It often shows up very early, the tendencies. Then there are obligers. Obligers readily meet outer expectations but they struggle to meet inner expectations. I saw this for the first time when I was coming up with a framework when a friend of mine said, "When I was in high school I was on the track team and I never missed track practice, so why can't I go running now on my own?" Well, she's an obliger. When she had a team and a coach waiting for her, she had no trouble showing up. When she was trying to go running on her own, she struggled. These are the people who will never let down a client. They would never not meet a deadline at work, but then when they're trying to start meditating every morning they can't stick to it. That's a challenge.

Then finally rebels. Rebels resist all expectations outer and inner alike. They want to do what they want to do in their own way in their own time. They can do anything they want to do, anything they choose to do, but if you ask or tell them to do something they're very likely to resist. Those are the four, and there are not the same number of all of them. The biggest tendency for both men and women, the one that the largest number of people belongs to is obliger. You either are an obliger or you have many obligers in your life. That's a big tendency. After that questioner. The smallest tendency, it's a conspicuous tendency but it's a small tendency is rebel and upholder, which is your tendency and my tendency, you and I are both upholders, only slightly larger. Not many people are upholders, which I don't know if you've noticed that, but most people are not upholders.

I can usually spot a fellow upholder coming. For you I was like, I think this guy is starting to sound like an upholder. That's the framework. Again, you can take a quiz if you go to gretchenrubin.com or maybe you just know what you are from listening to the short description.

Robert Glazer: I'm going to make a guess that rebels, a lot of them work for themselves?

Gretchen Rubin: Well that's interesting. A lot of rebels do. They often, because they don't want to have a boss. Some rebels though, it's hard for them because they don't want to tell themselves what to do. That can be hard if you're trying to go out on your own. I guess what I should say is the tendencies don't tell you anything else about somebody. It doesn't tell you how ambitious somebody is, how analytical

somebody is, how curious somebody is, how considerate of other people's feelings, how idealistic, how adventurous. If you have a highly ambitious, driven rebel, they could work for themselves because they're like "I want to be a big success." They can do anything they want that they think is going to make them a success. They could be very successful if that's what they want. But if they don't want that, if they don't have the other parts of their personality like that, then they might not succeed there because they're just out and on their own.

It's interesting, some rebels are very attracted to areas of high regulation like the police, the clergy, the military, or large corporations with lots of rules, which puzzled me for a long time. But what these rebels describe is that they feel like they need rules to push against, that when they're in this place with lots of rules it's almost like that gives them the energy. It's like pushing off from the side of the swimming pool, and that if they're not in an environment like that they kind of get paralyzed or they just go stagnant because there's nothing to create the energy. They kind of need the energy of resistance, but then they find a way to succeed within it. They're in the military and they're like, "Well, I'm really successful in the military but I always find a way around the rules. I break the rules sometimes, but somehow I find a way to succeed."

It's hard to make generalizations because there's so many ... Some rebels are really good at sales because it's like, "Hey man, you just do whatever you need to do to make a sale," and a rebel's like, "Okay. Alright, that's awesome." But then usually people of other tendencies could also go out on their own and could also be good salespeople. You could say questioners make good journalists. Well questioners do make good journalists, but people of the other tendency also make good journalists. There's so many factors that make someone suited to a profession.

Robert Glazer: How can someone use these either personally or professionally? What is the best way for them to think about how to use these and how to relate to folks that are similar or different?

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah, I think you're right. You can use it to manage yourself better, and you can also use it to communicate better with other people, like to minimize conflict, and to persuade better, and to figure out how to get things done. I think the thing when you're dealing with yourself, all the tendencies have strengths and weaknesses, and they all include people who have been really successful and also big losers. It's not a question of wishing that you were a different tendency, but figuring out how to harness the strength of your tendency, and then offset the limitations and weaknesses of your tendencies. So for instance let's take obligers because that's the biggest group. Obligers are often frustrated because they see themselves meeting other people's expectations but they're not meeting expectations that they have for themselves. They're like, "What's wrong with me? Can't I make myself a priority? Can't I keep promises to myself? Why can't I make time for what's important to me?" That's frustrating.

Once you know that you're an obliger, then the solution of this problem becomes extremely clear and straightforward and simple, which is outer accountability. To meet inner expectations, obligers need outer accountability. That's just what they need. They can say things like, "Well, I don't know to be dependent on outer accountability." It's like well, I don't know what to say, this is what works for obligers, outer accountability. If you want to read more, join a book group. If you want to exercise more, take a class, work out with a trainer, work out with a friend who's going to be annoyed if you don't show up. Take your dog for a run who's going to be so disappointed if he doesn't get to go for his run. Think of your duty to be a role model for other people. Think of your obligation to your future self. There's a million ways to create outer accountability once you know that is what you need. Obligers need outer accountability.

But, it's complicated because rebels often do worse with outer accountability. They resist outer accountability. They don't want someone looking over their shoulder and enforcing. That doesn't work for them. You need to take that into account. Okay, if I'm dealing with a rebel, I will definitely write emails in different ways depending on what tendency of person that I'm communicating with. You can give your message in a way that's going to resonate more with them, and then also with yourself. So for instance, questioners, questioner is very focused on justification. They need to have reasons. They always are saying, "Well why should I?" They have to get the answers to that.

Whenever I talk to a questioner who's like, "Well, I really want to eat healthfully. I don't know why I'm not." Questioners usually once they make up their mind to meet an inner expectation they can do it. My answer is always are you really convinced? Have you really decided in your own mind this is ... There's a lot of theories about how you should eat. Do you in your own mind have perfect clarity about what you think is the best way for you, the most efficient, the most justified reason for you to do it. Usually they're like, "No, because some people are telling me to eat paleo, but then sometimes people are telling me to be vegan and I don't really know what's the best way." I'm like you've got to get that clarity because once you know what you expect from yourself, that's when questioners do well.

Now if I'm talking to a questioner ... I'm married to a questioner so I know what it's like to talk to a questioner ... You always have to explain why. You can't just ask them to do something because they're going to be like, "I'm not going to do that just because you tell me to. Why should I do that?" Like if I said to my husband, "Will you pick up smoked turkey on the way home," the fact is he wouldn't because he'd be thinking to himself, "Well, if you want smoked turkey, you pick it up. We have plenty of food at home. I don't understand why I have to run this errand." If I say to him, "Can you pick up smoked turkey on your way home because our daughter's going on a field trip and she needs to pack a brown bag lunch, and I don't have time to go to the grocery store today," he's

like, "Oh, that's a good reason. Then I will do it." But I've learned I need to give him reasons.

If you have a questioner son, you have to explain why. If I'm telling you to memorize the multiplication tables, why? Why do you have to do that? There's an answer for that. But saying, "Because you're in fourth grade and all fourth graders have to memorize multiplication tables," or, "Because I'm the teacher and I say so," that's not a good reason. They often won't do something if they don't think there's a good reason. You've got to explain to them. You've got to take the time. It's sad to me to hear from so many questioners where they just won't do something because they don't understand why they should, even when it can have pretty big consequences for them, their refusal. But it's pretty easy to explain to them why they should do something. By the way, if there is no good reason why they should do it, then they shouldn't have to do it.

This is why it's good for all of us to have questioners around because if you have a questioner in the workplace, they're the ones that are saying, "Why should we switch to the new software? Why are we doing this by Friday? Why are we using this format? Why are we doing this at all?" That's useful because everybody else just would be not having those fundamental questions all the time. It can get exhausting too. That's the downside. It really can very profoundly affect how you manage yourself and how you manage other people.

Robert Glazer:

That's really interesting because one of the things that we really train our team on is when they're asked questions, by clients, is to respond with a why. Oftentimes in even answering the question that they're being asked or responding to it, they're not understanding why they're being asked that and they may get it totally wrong. It goes to something we were talking about before where under-communicating just never is good. As you were saying that, it just occurred to me I think for any tendency, "Hey, can you get the turkey?" that you could probably check off a lot of people's buckets by explaining more about why you need the turkey, and why you can't get it, and what it's being used for.

Gretchen Rubin:

But here's the thing, there's a time and a cost to explanations. Questioners often do drain and overwhelm other people because they need more information than other people want. See with my husband, just to take the very homely example, I don't want to get into that. He can ask me to do something and I will just assume he's got a reason. I don't need to have a lot ... I don't want to read a long email explaining this to me. If you need it by Friday, just tell me, "I need it by Friday." I actually am not interested in knowing why for your purposes you need this by Friday. That's just noise to me. You could say, "Well then maybe you don't really need to have it done by Friday. Maybe you could have it done by Monday, and so it's good to be a questioner." Well in some cases it is, but there's a cost to it.

It's not always like more explanation is better because more explanation can sometimes exhaust people and if they don't want that information. I think

there's ways actually that you can build this in. Nobody wants to be asked to do something that's arbitrary or totally pointless, so to a point it's important. You could imagine, like let's say I'm the boss and corporate has decided we're going to do this new software and so I'm presenting it to the team. "Okay, we're going to use this new software." I could give a brief presentations explaining, "This is the reason that we're doing, this is what's happening," quick summary. Then I could say, "If you feel like you've heard enough about why we're switching software please feel free to return to your desks. If you would like to remain here, I am happy to answer your questions for as long as you need so that you can understand why we're making this change and why we think it's valuable."

That way some people are like, "Oh my gosh, who cares? I don't want to hear a lot about the ins and outs of 10 different software programs. Whatever. This is for you guys to decide, that's not my problem. I get to back to my desk and make sales calls," or whatever it is that I'm doing. But then the questioners who are like, "Hey man, I'm not going to switch software just because you say so. You got to convince me that this is going to go to the bottom line. What's you're thinking here? I don't get it." Then okay, your questions are going to get answers. I don't have to take everybody's time to do that because then some people start getting bored, and some people start getting annoyed, and then it's like a lot of tension. Is it bad that some people are asking these questions? No, it's positive. Does everybody need to be exposed to the same level of information? In some situations, not.

If I'm a doctor talking to a patient, well how much information is useful for that patient? Some patients have an inexhaustible desire for information, and that's a problem to deal with. Then others don't want any at all. Then you sort of want them to know enough, but you don't need to provide the same level. They might just find that to be overwhelming or distracting. It's just that people are different.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, you have to look for the cues it sounds like, and know your audience.

Gretchen Rubin: Then also not to take it amiss. Sometimes what happens with questioners is they get someone who's defensive or thin-skinned, that person can feel very defensive of being asked questions. It's like, "Okay, you don't have to feel attacked or like this person's undermining your judgment or your authority, they just want to have their questions answered." I can respond differently. If I'm an obliher and my boss just keeps saying, "Oh, just whenever this is a good time for you get back to me on this." You could say to your boss, "You know what, I really do better when we have deadlines. Let's sit down and talk through when do you need these things by because that's going to help me follow through. If you just leave everything like floating around, I just might never get around to it."

Whereas with an upholder, that would work fine. That's how upholders basically tend to talk. When this works for you, will you do it, but then we expect people

to flawlessly execute on their own. It's like, well by the way that doesn't happen very often. Upholders often aren't good managers because they don't understand why other people need either to have more questions answered, or they need more autonomy and freedom of choice, or they need more accountability. It's like once you realize that, then it's like okay, well how do we build these things in for the people who need them.

Robert Glazer: I now realize I was in a dialogue with a questioner this morning about getting on a conference call to discuss something that we would do or not do with this partner. My thought was that that call would be about asking the questions, but I got about 10 questions back around why we should be getting on the call to ask the questions.

Gretchen Rubin: Right? Yeah.

Robert Glazer: I was like, "The point of the call is to ask the questions. I don't have the answer to the question."

Gretchen Rubin: Right. Right, right, right.

Robert Glazer: So, that is now illuminating that for me.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah, the funny thing about the tendencies is once you know about them, they're very obvious. I see them on TV shows, I see them in novels, I see them in movies, I see them in the people around me. There's certain things that are just tip-offs, like things that people say. You're like, "Okay, that person's probably a this." Really you can start tailoring your communication in a way. So for instance, I'm an upholder and kind of the opposite of the upholder is the rebel. But whenever I'm saying something to a rebel, like when I'm trying to ... I don't really have anybody who works for me, but I kind of collaborate and team up with people for different things. With a rebel it's always like, "If you have the time and the inclination, could you do this?" Or, "If this works for you, might you consider doing this?" This is something that I found really interesting and I thought well maybe you would find it interesting too."

I made the mistake, I found this great ... I don't even remember what it was, but like this hashtag that was hilarious, and I emailed a rebel friend. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, you have to go onto this hashtag," and she refused. I was like of course she did. You can't tell a rebel, "You have to do this," because then they're going to be like, "No, I don't." "You have to read this." "No, I don't." "You're going to love this. You have to listen to this music." "No, I won't." I should've said something like, "Oh my gosh. I'm cracking up so hard looking at this. Have you seen it?" Then it's like-

Robert Glazer: Let it be their idea.

Gretchen Rubin: You can look at it if you want. I think it's hilarious, but do you? If you just want to ignore it you can. But saying something like, "You have to," "You must," "You said you would," that doesn't work for a rebel so you have to think about how to communicate with them in a way that doesn't ignite the spirit of resistance. Again, it sounds a lot harder than it is because once you see these patterns it's very easy to think like, "Oh, well I see how if I added a sentence or two here it would appeal to the questioner. I see if I added this, that, and the other thing it would appeal more to an obliger. If I said this, that, the other thing, it would appeal more to a rebel." One of the things I love is signage and seeing what signs appeal to what tendencies, or even who wrote it. A lot of times you can tell the tendency of the person who wrote a sign, like vernacular signs, signs that people leave in an office kitchen or something like that.

Somebody told me about, it is an advertising jingle from decades ago and yet people still talk about it because it was so powerful. I think it's so powerful because it appeals equally to all four tendencies. That is the line, "Only you can prevent forest fires." That works for upholders, questioners, obligers, and rebels. It's one sentence long. It's powerful. But \$50 fine for leaving your campsite unattended, it's like well why ... You can get into all kinds of signs that will trip off people's different objections, but that's a great line. I think that's part of why it's so memorable is because it works so well.

Robert Glazer: It makes you think.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah.

Robert Glazer: What's your next book going to be about?

Gretchen Rubin: I'm doing a funny little book called Outer Order, Inner Calm, which is coming out in March, because I've been intrigued ever since I wrote The Happiness Project by how fired up people get about getting outer order. In the context of the happy life, something like a messy coat closet or an overflowing in basket at work, you've got files on the floor, it's like it's not a big deal and yet over and over people say to me that when they get control of this stuff of their life they feel more in control of their life generally. I just think it's kind of funny. It's disproportionate. A friend of mine said to me, "I finally cleaned out my fridge and now I know I can switch careers." I was like, "I know exactly what you mean by that." I just wanted to do a fun little thing about creating outer order. That's not a big book, that's a little book that I kind of couldn't resist.

Robert Glazer: Is that coming out-

Gretchen Rubin: I couldn't resist writing it.

Robert Glazer: It's coming out-

Gretchen Rubin: In March.

Robert Glazer: In March, okay, next March.

Gretchen Rubin: Yeah. The 10th anniversary of The Happiness Project is coming up, so a re-released edition of that is coming out in November of 2018. It'll have stuff in the back that's all for the anniversary, and so that'll be fun. It's not a new book, but it's a book milestone.

Robert Glazer: Alright great. Last question that's a favorite of ours is what's a personal or professional mistake that you've made that you've learned the most from?

Gretchen Rubin: Instead of a mistake can I talk about a failure?

Robert Glazer: Absolutely, put them in the same bucket.

Gretchen Rubin: Okay. Yeah, so you mentioned much earlier in our discussion that I had written these biographies, these historical books. I wrote a book called 40 Ways to Look at JFK, which is this sort of short unconventional biography of JFK. I loved writing that book. It was a joy to write that book. But as they say in the publishing industry, that book did not find its audience. That's what they tell you when your book is a flop. "Your book did not find its audience," which is a very diplomatic thing to say. But, nevertheless what it taught me was I had written this book that I loved, that I felt was really, really good, that I thought a lot of people would be interested in it and yet no one was buying it. I felt very powerless because in the book industry it's like I couldn't control if I got on morning television shows. I couldn't control whether anybody reviewed it. I couldn't control whether people assigned profiles or feature stories. I couldn't control if historical groups put it in their newsletter. I had no control over that.

I had no way myself of telling people about the book. I was totally dependent on these other intermediaries to do it or not do it. From that failure I was like, "I feel that I must develop a direct relationship with readers. I want to be able to contact people myself." It's sort of like one of these things where, "Well maybe they will want to read the book, or maybe they won't but I want to be able to tell them that the book exists." I think for a lot of things it's like you just don't even know it's there. That's only more and more a problem. There's just so much of everything. Because of that, I started my blog. I wanted to do something novel and challenging as part of the experiment of The Happiness Project, so I started a blog. From there I started a newsletter. From there now I have an Ask Gretchen Rubin Live show on Facebook. I have my podcast, Happier with Gretchen Rubin.

But all of this is from this decision that I made, "I must have a direct connection to readers. I myself. I cannot be dependent on these intermediaries to get the word out for me. I need to have tools myself." I've tried things that didn't work, but a lot of things that I have, have really helped me connect directly with readers. It's been a huge engine of happiness. I love being able to hear from readers. I hear from readers, and viewers, and listeners constantly, which I love.

That makes me happy. They also give me a lot of information, a lot of insights and examples of the things I'm writing about, so that's super helpful. Then also I am able to feel like again, I can't make somebody buy a book, I can't make somebody be interested in a book, but I can at least tell people that there is a book and that's as much as you can do.

But if I hadn't had that book fail in the way that it did, I don't think that I would've felt that need. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of work to figure out how to do these things and then maintain them well. It's a whole other aspect of my writing career that I did not anticipate when I became a writer. A lot of writers really resist doing those things. They don't want to do that kind of work. I think if I hadn't had that failure at a key moment, I probably would have a completely different career and a completely different writerly world that I live in. So it was a very valuable failure. It hurt. It was not a fun way to learn a lesson. There's a great Benjamin Franklin quote where he says, "Experience keeps a dear school, but a fool will learn in no other." I feel like that's what happened to me. It's like I learned the lesson the hard way, but I did learn it and it was very valuable.

Robert Glazer: Well Gretchen, it's been an honor having you on Outperform. Your work is both inspiring and fascinating. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today, and bringing more happiness and good habits into all of our lives.

Gretchen Rubin: Excellent. It was so much fun to talk to you. Thanks for having me.

Robert Glazer: Alright, for our listeners we'll include notes from the episode and links to Gretchen's website, podcast, and her tendency quiz in our show notes. Until next time, keep outperforming.